
SOIL MECHANICS FOR UNSATURATED SOILS

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A Wiley-Interscience Publication

JOHN WILEY & SONS, INC.

New York • Chichester • Brisbane • Toronto • Singapore

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data:

Fredlund, D. G. (Delwyn G.), 1940-

Soil mechanics for unsaturated soils / D. G. Fredlund and H. Rahardjo

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-471-85008-X

1. Soil mechanics. 2. Soil moisture. 3. Soil—Testing.

I. Rahardjo, H. (Harianto) II. Title.

TA710.5.F73 1993

624.1'5136—dc20

92-30869

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Dedicated
to our parents
George and Esther Fredlund
and
Sugiarto and Pauline Rahardjo
who taught us that the fear of the Lord was the beginning of
wisdom and that the love of the Lord makes life worth living

Delwyn G. Fredlund
Harianto Rahardjo

FOREWORD

The appearance of a new book on Geotechnical Engineering is always an important occasion; but the appearance of the first book on an important aspect of Soil Mechanics is especially noteworthy. In this volume, Professor Fredlund and Dr. Rahardjo present the first textbook solely concerned with the behavior of unsaturated soils. The timing is particularly propitious.

It is evident that since much of the developed world enjoys a temperate climate, resulting in primarily saturated soil conditions, the literature has been biased toward problems involving saturated soils. Moreover, the theoretical understandings and associated experimental procedures required for an understanding of unsaturated soil behavior are intrinsically more complex than those required for saturated soil behavior. As a result, the ability to synthesize unsaturated soil mechanics has lagged behind its saturated counterpart. This has been to the detriment of both students and practitioners alike.

The climatic conditions that give rise to unsaturated soils can be found on every continent. Indeed, in some countries, unsaturated soil conditions dominate. The engineering problems associated with unsaturated soil mechanics extend over an enormous range. The requirements for design and construction of low-cost lightly loaded housing on expansive soils have been with us for a long time. More financial losses arise annually from damages due to unsaturated expansive soil behavior than from any other ground failure hazard. At the other extreme, unsaturated soils are used as a buffer material in almost every proposal for the underground storage of nuclear waste. Hence, the need to understand the mechanics of unsaturated soil behavior extends from concerns for low cost housing to some of the most complex environmental issues of our time.

I expect that this volume will quickly become the classic reference in its field. It will not be possible to teach, conduct research, or undertake modern design related to unsaturated soils without reference to Fredlund and Rahardjo. The authors have wisely maintained the framework of classical soil mechanics and sought to extend it in order to incorporate soil suction phenomena as an independent variable that is amenable to measurement and calculation. This will greatly facilitate the use of this comprehensive volume and quickly result in a more profound understanding of unsaturated soil behavior.

The road to this volume has been a difficult one. Many early leaders of Soil Mechanics pointed in the right direction, but it has taken more than thirty years of sustained effort to reach the end of the journey marked by this publication. All those who participated in the voyage should share pleasure in the outcome.

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April 1993*

PREFACE

Numerous textbooks have been written on the subject of soil mechanics. The subject matter covered and the order of presentation vary somewhat from text to text, but the main emphasis is always on the application of the principles of soil mechanics to problems involving *saturated* soils.

A significant portion of the earth's surface is subjected to arid and semi-arid climatic conditions, and as a result, many of the soils encountered in engineering practice are unsaturated. This textbook addresses the subject of soil mechanics as it relates to the behavior of *unsaturated* soils. More specifically, the text addresses that class of problems where the soils have a matric suction or where the pore-water pressure is negative.

Whether the soil is unsaturated or saturated, it is the negative pore-water pressure that gives rise to this unique class of soil mechanics problems. When the pore-water pressure is negative, it is advantageous, and generally necessary, to use two independent stress state variables to describe the behavior of the soil. This is in contrast to saturated soil mechanics problems where it is possible to relate the behavior of the soil to one stress state variable, namely, the effective stress variable.

The terms *saturated soil mechanics* and *unsaturated soil mechanics* are primarily used to designate conditions where the pore-water pressures are positive and negative, respectively. Soils situated above the groundwater table have negative pore-water pressures. The engineering problems involved may range from the expansion of a swelling clay to the loss of shear strength in a slope. Microclimatic conditions in an area produce a surface flux boundary condition which produces flow through the upper portion of the soil profile.

It would appear that most problems addressed in *saturated* soil mechanics have a counter problem of interest in *unsaturated* soils. In addition, the remolding and compacting of soils is an important part of many engineering projects. Compacted soils have negative pore-water pressures. The range of subjects of interest involving negative pore-water pressures are vast, and the problems are becoming of increasing relevance, particularly in arid regions.

An attempt has been made to write this textbook in an introductory manner. However, the subject matter is inherently complex. The need for such a book is clearly demonstrated by engineering needs associated with various projects around the world. The frustrations are expressed primarily by engineers who have received advanced training in conventional soil mechanics, only to discover difficult problems in practice involving unsaturated soils for which their knowledge is limited.

The textbook makes no attempt to redevelop concepts well known to saturated soil mechanics. Rather, the book is designed to be an extension of classical saturated soil mechanics. As far as is possible, the principles and concepts for unsaturated soils are developed as extensions of the principles and concepts for saturated soils. In this way, the reader should be able to readily grasp the formulations required for unsaturated soil mechanics.

The general format for the textbook is similar to that used in most classical soil mechanics textbooks. The book starts by introducing the breadth of unsaturated soil mechanics problems. It then presents material related to the: 1) volume-mass properties, 2) stress state variables, 3) flow behavior, and 4) pore pressure parameters for unsaturated soils. The book then goes on to present material on the: 5) shear strength and 6) volume change behavior of unsaturated soils. The latter part of the book concludes with material on the transient processes of interest to geotechnical engineering.

A brief summary of the chapters of the textbook is as follows. Chapter 1 presents a brief history of developments related to the behavior of unsaturated soils. The need for an understanding of unsaturated soil mechanics is presented, along with the scope and description of common geotechnical problems. The nature of an unsaturated soil element is described, concentrating on the difference between a saturated and an unsaturated soil. Chapter 2 presents the phase properties and the volume–mass relations of interest to unsaturated soils. This chapter provides some overlap with classical soil mechanics, but emphasizes extensions to the theory. The steps involved in all derivations are described in detail in order to assist the reader in this relatively new field.

Chapter 3 is devoted to describing the stress state variables of relevance in solving engineering problems associated with soils having negative pore–water pressures. The concept of the stress state is presented in detail because of its extreme importance in understanding the formulations presented later in the textbook. One needs only to examine the importance of the role of the effective stress concept in the development of saturated soil mechanics to realize the importance of an acceptable description of the stress state for unsaturated soils. The authors believe that a thorough understanding of the stress state provides the basis for developing a transferable science for unsaturated soil mechanics.

A knowledge of the stress state reveals that the measurement of the pore–water pressure is mandatory. The measurement of highly negative pore–water pressures and soil suction is difficult. Chapter 4 summarizes techniques and devices that have been developed and used to measure negative pore–water pressures and soil suction.

There are three fundamental soil properties that are commonly associated with soil mechanics problems. The properties are: 1) coefficient of permeability, 2) shear strength parameters, and 3) volume change coefficients. These properties are covered in the next nine chapters. Each of the properties is addressed from three standpoints. First, the theory related to the soil property is presented. Second, the measurement of pertinent soil properties is discussed, along with the presentation of typical values. Third, the application of the soil properties to specific soil mechanics problems is formulated and discussed. The logistics of these chapters is as follows:

Chapters Presenting the Following Material

Soil Property	Theory	Measurement	Application
Permeability	5	6	7
Shear Strength	9	10	11
Volume Change	12	13	14

Descriptions of the equipment required for the measurement of the soil properties are presented under each of the “Measurement” chapters. The main application problems presented pertaining to permeability are two-dimensional, earth dam seepage analyses. For shear strength, the applications are lateral earth pressure, bearing capacity, and slope stability problems, with most emphasis on the latter. The primary volume change problem is the prediction of the heave of light structures.

Chapter 8 presents the theory and typical test results associated with pore pressure parameters. Its location in the text is dictated by its importance in discussing undrained loading and the shear strength of soils.

The theory of consolidation, as well as unsteady-state flow analysis, require the combining of the volume change characteristics of a soil with its permeability characteristics. These analyses have formed an integral part of saturated soil mechanics and greatly assist the engineer in understanding soil behavior. Chapter 15 deals with the one-dimensional theory of consolidation, while Chapter 16 presents two- and three-dimensional, unsteady-state flow for unsaturated soils. The theory related to surface flux boundary conditions, as it relates to microclimatic conditions, is briefly presented in Chapter 16.

There is a great need for case histories to illustrate and substantiate the theories related to unsaturated soil behavior. One of the main objectives of this book is to synthesize the available research information and solidify an unsaturated soil theoretical context in order to form a basis for future studies in the form of case histories.

The book is the result of many years of study, research, and help from numerous persons. We thank the many authors and publishers for permission to reproduce figures and use information from research papers.

We want to acknowledge the support provided for the preparation of the manuscript. We thank Professor P. N. Nikiforuk, Dean of the College of Engineering, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada, and Professor Chen Charng Ning, Dean of the School of Civil and Structural Engineering, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, for their encouragement and support. Thanks to Mr. A. W. Clifton, Clifton Associates Ltd., Regina, Canada, who was particularly instrumental in ensuring that the theoretical concepts and formulations for unsaturated soils were in a form which could readily be put into engineering practice. Several students and colleagues provided invaluable assistance in the review of the manuscript. Recognition is due to Dr. S. L. Barbour and Dr. G. W. Wilson for their review of several chapters. Miss E. Imre of Budapest, Hungary, provided helpful review of several chapters. Dr. D. E. Pufahl reviewed Chapter 2, and Dr. D. Y. F. Ho reviewed Chapters 9 and 10. We are particularly grateful to Professor N. R. Morgenstern who has continued to provide insight and encouragement into the study of the behavior of unsaturated soils.

We also wish to thank the typists, Mrs. Gladie Russell, Mr. Mark Vanstone, Miss Tracey Regier, Miss Kerri Fischer, and Mrs. Leslie Pavier for their endurance and meticulous typing of our many drafts. We are particularly grateful to Mrs. Pavier who organized the many persons involved in producing the final manuscript. Mr. J. L. Loi took a keen interest in the drafting of the figures, the replotting of figures to SI units, and the checking of data. Miss Kyla Fischer and Ms. Deidre S. Komarychka performed meticulous work in preparing the figures. The authors wish to acknowledge the excellent editing and proof-reading of all the chapters by Mr. Sai K. Vanapalli, Mr. Julian Gan and Dr. A. Xing. Mr. L. Lam analyzed several of the example problems in Chapters 7 and 16. Mr. J. Lau and Mr. K. Fredlund organized the extensive list of references for the book. The work and efforts of other graduate students are deeply appreciated.

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April 1993*

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